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Abraham and Isaac.

The Distinguished Patriarch's Own
Version of a Noted Incident, as
Given by Him to M. Nozière of Le
Temps and Adapted into English
by the Evening Post; with some
Emendations and Comment by
THE LOTUS.



THE city editor said to me:

"Here's something for your
first story that may pan out pretty
well. There is this new play of
Paul Bourget's, 'The Tribune.'

It's about a father who hasn't the
courage to sacrifice his son to his ideals. It
would be a good thing to get some leading citi-
zen's opinion on the subject. It's a pity there
is no one to take the place of M. Rénan. There
was a philosopher for you—always ready to see
a reporter, and never astonished at anything
we asked him. He'd smile and tell you what
he thought about the latest fashion, the café-
concerts, or the Pope. Of course, we took ad-
vantage of his kindness. We saddled him with

THE all kinds of opinions, because we knew he'd
LOTUS never repudiate them. He wouldn't stoop to
hurting a reporter by writing letters to the editor. He knew that a few printed lines wouldn't interfere seriously with the swing of the universe."

I was listening with admiration to this extraordinary departure from the professional manner, when the city editor came to himself, and snapped out, "Well, then, go out and find Abraham and pump him."

I knew enough not to ask for further particulars about Abraham. The newspaper man must know his Paris. I rushed down the stairs as fast as I could, in order to create a favorable impression of my activity, and entered a café. There I consulted the directory and the Tout-Paris. I found that there were among the Abrahams a laundryman, a banker, an upholsterer and a professor. But it was plain that none of these was the man I was to pump. So I had to consult the city editor, after all, and he sent me to the original Abraham. Science has reached the point where communication with the past has become an everyday affair. As a matter of fact, the shades are as eager for

publicity as the living. They are only too glad to be interviewed, and in recent years the number of sorcerers has grown enormously. I went straight to the house of a noted lady magician, and ten minutes later I was in the presence of a venerable old man.



HE began by pronouncing some words that I failed to understand. He spoke with conviction, with violence, even. What he said was of the highest importance, I felt sure, but I could not catch the meaning of a single word.

"I beg pardon," I said, "but couldn't you make your meaning a little plainer? Its a common thing for the dead, like the oracles, to express themselves in obscure terminology. I should regard it as a favor if you would abstain from reversing the order of the letters in your words when you speak, a pleasantry common enough among ghosts. It makes conversation difficult and devoid of spontaneity. Or, if you must, please speak slowly. Give me time to retranspose the letters so that when you say 'Ni em uoy dloheb Maharba' I will know you mean 'In me you behold Abraham.'"

THE
LOTUS

But Abraham merely shrugged his shoulders. "Do you take me for a stage ghost? I am a serious person. I should ordinarily make use of my national tongue, the Hebrew, but since that idiom is no longer familiar to you, I should be glad to answer your questions in French. What is it you'd like to know?"

I then told him that the intelligent reading public would be glad to have his views on paternal affection, the education of children, etc., etc.

"Ah, yes," he said, "I have seen 'The Tribune.' I floated in at the first performance. I know what it's all about, and I am grateful to M. Bourget for what he has done to perpetuate my memory. Of course, he made no mention of my name, but when a father is on the point of sacrificing his son you cannot help thinking of old Abraham. Yes, it was to that incident undoubtedly that I owe my permanent popularity. I am proud of it to-day, but I don't mind confessing to you that I was badly afraid of my wife's reproaches and the hostility of my neighbors when I listened to the command from on high."

A T first I attached no particular importance to the mysterious voice that I heard. In those days men lived in the midst of the supernatural. To-day you are compelled to employ the most ridiculous means to get into touch with us. But in those days we always felt the presence of angels and demons. As we walked in the fields we would catch a flash of wings, white or black, and frequently when we did not know which road to take an invisible voice would call out, 'Further to your left!' We were not afraid. It seemed quite natural that we should dwell in proximity to our brothers, the spirits, and the Creator, our Father.

"Now, I was once on my way to the fields, and the Lord said to me:

"'Build an altar and offer up to me your son, Isaac.'

"I thought that I had not heard aright. It seemed to me utterly impossible that the Supreme Goodness should demand such an atrocity. I decided it was an illusion of the ears and went on. I was glad to find that my men had worked well, and that the harvest would be an abundant one. I thanked the Almighty for the rain he had sent me and the fructifying sun. I pro-



THE strated myself in prayer; and then I shivered as
LOTUS I heard once more the order:

“‘Build an altar and offer up to me your son, Isaac.

“And yet I was alone in my orchard. In the distance a young girl was picking fruit and laughing. The day was delightful. The earth looked happy. Once more the terrible voice resounded. I hastened towards the house, I ran. I came into the chamber where I saw Isaac was playing. I wept as I kissed him, for I had thought never to see him again.

“I had planned to hide my sorrow from my venerable spouse. But she saw that I was in grief and she succeeded in wresting from me the cause of my distress.

“‘It is impossible,’ she said, ‘that the Lord should have spoken thus.’



“**B**UT near us the voice once more arose and my wife heard. She fell trembling to her knees as a crash of thunder resounded. For ten days fell rain and hail. The fields were devastated. It froze during the nights and burned during the day. Men and animals perished.

The bravest cowered before the celestial wrath.
Isaac alone kept up his spirits.

“I said to my wife:

“‘Is it right that the whole land should suffer because I am unwilling to obey the divine command? Have we the right to sacrifice the prosperity of the people for the sake of our child? To keep him alive we are slaying our brothers. Think of those that have perished in a single week by the will of the Most High! Recall all the children that are no more because we have been unwilling to give our Isaac to the Lord. His health means the death of all others. When he laughs I hear the groans of all the fathers and mothers that are weeping because of him, because of us. Shall I speak frankly? His life seems a monstrous thing to me. In spite of myself I can feel only horror at him.’

“My wife looked at me for a long time and said, ‘You have not carried him under your heart.’ And then in an access of rage: ‘Let every other child perish. I must keep my own.’

“And again we heard the voice,

“‘Build an altar and offer up to me your son, Isaac.’

“She raised her clenched fists to the heavens



THE but I bowed my head. She understood that I
LOTUS had determined to obey. She shrieked and fell
unconscious.



“NO sooner did my heart bow to the will of the Master than the sky grew gentle. I sought out Isaac. I told him that a short walk would be pleasant, and that I should like to have him come with me as far as the hillock. He asked me why I was pale and why my voice shook. I told him that I was a bit indisposed—like every one else. He kissed my hands and in his clear and innocent eyes I saw an infinite pity. He asked whether his mother too was ailing, and whether she would not accompany us to the hillock. I told him she had to attend to some household duties. He wanted to kiss her before we set out, but I told him that we must hurry if we were to take advantage of the brief sunshine.

“On the way he smiled at the trees in the orchard. They were his friends. He promised them that soon they should suffer no more, that they should bear blossom and fruit. The way seemed pitifully short. We ascended the hil-

lock and I saw with horror that the altar was ready. It was undoubtedly the work of the Lord, who did not wish to give me time to think.



“‘Are you going to offer up a sacrifice?’ said the child. ‘But where is a victim?’

“‘I could not keep back my tears. And he said quietly, ‘I am ready.’ He held out the knife to me.

“‘I lifted up my arm to strike, but I heard the voice of the Lord:

“‘Abraham,’ He said, ‘You have not fathomed my will. You should have disobeyed. You should have rebelled. There is nothing in the world that can justify an act like that you were about to commit. In the face of disaster, in the face of menace, the father must defend his child, innocent or guilty. Your wife understood.’

“‘Lord,’ I cried, ‘Thy will be praised. Why, then, hast Thou put me to trial?’

“‘To glorify your wife, who did not obey me. To glorify the sacred clarivoyance of motherhood.’”



THE
LOTUS

[THUS Abraham to M. Nozière, to whom thanks for having secured from the shade of the distinguished Patriarch the true version of a much mooted narrative. Would that M. Nozière might now seek out Jonah and interview that ancient adventurer upon his feelings while residing within the main thoroughfare of a whale; or discover the whale and secure from that interesting mammal a description of its sensations while Jonah was carrying on light house-keeping in its midst and putting up pictures and curtains on its walls, or sweeping its floor with a vacuum cleaner. Editor THE LOTUS.]

